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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001882

SIPDIS

NSC FOR DEPUTY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR HADLEY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [IR](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR HADLEY'S DECEMBER 5 MEETING WITH SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD AL FAISAL

REF: MANAMA 1814

Classified by A/DCM Hallie H. Hahn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Deputy National Security Advisor Hadley met with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal December 5 on the margins of the IISS Gulf Security Dialogue conference in Manama. DNSA Hadley encouraged Saud to reach out to Iraqi Sunnis to participate in the January 30 elections. The Foreign Minister said that the SAG had done so but questioned whether the elections would result in a stable and secure government and country. He recommended that the Iraqis start with municipal elections and allow local political leaders to establish credibility and form the nucleus of political parties. Saud doubted Syria would allow itself to become an assembly, training, and financing point for the Iraqi insurgency, saying this is "too obvious." Iran is fully operational inside Iraq, spreading its influence and establishing cells. Saudi Arabia wants to normalize its relations with the U.S. while carrying out its internal reform process at deliberate speed, keeping in mind the nature of Saudi society. DNSA Hadley pointed out that Saudi Arabia could do more, and said that Saudi Arabia's failure to include women voters in municipal elections had gotten a lot of attention in the U.S. End Summary.

Reaching Out to Iraqi Sunnis

[1](#)2. (C) DNSA Hadley opened the meeting by expressing the President's intention to reach out to friends and allies in order to reach global solutions to global problems. He said the President plans to expend political capital on issues in the Middle East, particularly Israel/Palestine, where he sees an opportunity to achieve a breakthrough. He also will focus on advancing the cause of liberty in Iraq and Afghanistan. In response to the Foreign Minister's question, DNSA Hadley replied that the U.S. is encouraging contact with Sunni opposition groups in Iraq, noting that he had delivered this message to each of his interlocutors at the IISS Gulf Dialogue conference. Saud stated that the Sunnis had ruled Iraq for 50 years, and the IIG now faced a difficult diplomatic battle in getting the Sunnis to join the political process. He said that the SAG had spoken with those Sunnis it knows inside Iraq and encouraged them to participate in the elections.

[1](#)3. (C) DNSA Hadley noted that some say the IIG should delay the January 30 elections to buy more time for outreach to the Sunni community. He said that while the U.S. agrees that outreach is important, we are very worried about letting the date slip. There could be a negative reaction from the Shia in Iraq and the political process could lose momentum. The ForMin stated that the elections are a means not an objective, and the important thing is the result, which should lead to a stable and secure government and country. Holding the elections that accomplish nothing could lead to people to say that the U.S. had tried elections, failed, and now was free to carry out a "full fledged occupation."

Start With Municipal Elections

[1](#)4. (C) Saud continued that Saudi Arabia believes a system of gradual elections would be best, starting with municipal elections. Elected local officials could assist people in rebuilding their lives in peace and security. As a result of this process, political leaders would emerge who would form the nucleus of political parties. Then ordinary citizens would not want to lose what they had gained and would turn away from the insurgents. This would allow for conditions to improve from the ground up. Pushing for elections and knowing they would be boycotted would be a tragic mistake. A reasonable person could do more damage than good by trying to accomplish the impossible. DNSA Hadley replied that the U.S.

believes that both a good election and a good outcome are possible. He emphasized that those who spend their time advocating for a delay could better devote their energies to encouraging Sunnis to participate.

15. (C) Saud suggested that greater attention should be devoted to security at the Iraq-Saudi border. He is concerned about spillover from Iraq to Saudi Arabia, saying the SAG does not want jihadists from Iraq joining the fight inside Saudi Arabia. He asserted that the SAG controlled movements across the border from Saudi Arabia into Iraq, and requested a strong effort to stop movement from Iraq into Saudi Arabia. He said that inside Saudi Arabia, Al Qaida is almost completely destroyed, but there are signs of a new leadership entering the Kingdom from Iraq.

Pressure Points on Syria

16. (C) In this regard, DNSA Hadley stated that the Syrian border concerns us the most. Syria had become an assembly, training, and finance point for foreign fighters. We are getting only symbolic cooperation at the border. The ForMin said that the U.S. could use several pressure points with the Syrians: the SARG badly wants a relationship with the U.S.; it does not want to be at the "tail end" of peace agreements with Israel; and the "silly" way Syria handles its relationship with Lebanon could be used to motivate Syria in the war against terror. He doubted whether Syria was in fact a center for the leadership of the Iraqi resistance. This was "too obvious;" Syria played a very careful game in dealing with Palestinian rejectionists. DNSA Hadley disagreed, saying that the SARG tolerated Hamas and PIJ in Damascus.

17. (C) In response to the DNSA's question, Saud said that Iran is confused about its nuclear program. You get different answers each day about whether the program is for power or fuel enrichment. The government says one thing, the parliament something else, and influential people like Khamenei and Rafsanjani provide another view. Iran is "fully operational" inside Iraq, with hundreds of thousands of people and enormous amounts of money. Iran is quietly spreading its influence and creating cells inside Iraq while the U.S. is engaged with the Sunni insurgency.

Desire to Normalize Bilateral Relations

18. (C) With regard to bilateral issues, the ForMin said that there was much press commentary in the U.S. about issues of concern in the relationship. Although the 9/11 commission "completely exonerated" Saudi Arabia, the SAG continues to hear the same accusations as before. He stated that Saudi Arabia wants to normalize our bilateral relations and not be forced to respond to what is written and said in the American media.

19. (C) Saud said that Saudi Arabia had done a lot in the war on terror and terrorism financing, but this goes unrecognized in the U.S. He stated that the Kingdom's reforms may not be theatrical, such as, hypothetically, appointing a woman as president of the Shura Council, but the country is moving in the right direction, at deliberate speed, keeping in mind the nature of Saudi society. For example, the SAG did not say Yes or No to women participating in municipal council elections, but it permitted women to be elected to chambers of commerce, where they now work side by side with men. The government does not force solutions on the people, but creates the environment for them to take their own decisions. The government intends to open to debate all subjects that formerly were taboo. He asserted that ten years ago, Saudi Sunnis believed that Shia inside the country "were devils." Now shaikhs from the two sects talk and eat dinner together. Saud cautioned that Saudi reforms would proceed at a sustainable, "deliberate" rate and that Saudi Arabia would never look like the West. Moving faster on Shia rights was just too hard. In a comment revealing much about how Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi heartland regards its Shia co-religionists, the ForMin said that forcing Nejdīs to accept the validity of Shia Islam "would be like the President bringing Michael Jackson to the Midwest and insisting he be everyone's role model."

110. (C) The Foreign Minister said that Saudi Arabia's rate of population growth had declined to 2.2 percent, a normal rate of increase. The expat workforce inside the country was down to six million. Per capita income rose from \$7,000 to \$11,500, and the poverty that was talked about earlier is "not there." Unemployment is down from millions to tens of thousands.

Do What is Workable

111. (C) DNSA Hadley stated that from the U.S. perspective,

the SAG had combated terrorism seriously since the May 2003 Riyadh attacks. We were less understanding about what Saudi Arabia had done to combat terrorism financing. Saudi Arabia's failure to include women voters in municipal elections had gotten a lot of attention in the U.S. Saud replied that the SAG would always choose to do what was workable. The majority of Saudis do not want to change the role of women. In addressing reform, Saudi Arabia must move with alacrity but carefully, without breaking social cohesion and maintaining societal consensus. But when the time comes for real decisions, the SAG does the right thing. For example, the government four years ago directed that males and females receive the same education, over the objection of the religious establishment. The SAG has removed from the mosques those who preach hate. But the government avoids taking symbolic steps with no real impact.

112. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

113. (C) The NSC cleared this message.

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